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ABSTRACT

Environmental differences for speech departments at large and small colleges are not simply of scale; there are qualitative as well as quantitative differences. At small colleges, faculty are hired as teachers, rather than as researchers. Because speech teachers at small colleges must be generalists, and because it is often difficult to replace departing faculty members, speech programs are often in danger of being cut. In terms of administration, channels are informal and contacts are personal for department chairs, a situation that has both advantages and disadvantages. Small colleges also demand a palpable loyalty, although such loyalty is very time consuming. However, teachers at small colleges tend to see themselves more as members of a unified faculty and less as members of individual departments. While the elements of multiple roles and responsibilities, informal channels, loyalty, and emphasis on teaching may exist at larger institutions, their presence characterizes the small college. It is thus within this context that the small college department administrator must operate. (HTH)

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THE SMALL COLLEGE ADMINISTRATIVE ENVIRONMENT

by

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The paper considers four aspects of the small college environment: emphasis on teaching, multiple roles and responsibilities, use of informal channels, and institutional loyalties. The chairing of a department at a small college takes place within this physical and psychological context.

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The Small College Administrative Environment

If there is a factor that characterizes the small college environment, it is teaching. Small colleges frequently describe themselves as primarily teaching institutions; for example, the Great Lakes Colleges Association describes its members, in its twenty-fifth anniversary report, as having atmospheres which, based on a philosophical commitment to the liberal arts and encouraged by the small campus sizes, favor teaching. Colleges in this consortium and in the similar consortium, the Associated Colleges of the Midwest, have as major sources of revenue student tuition and fees, private and corporate gifts and endowments, auxiliary enterprises, and government grants, but research grants from government or private sources are minimal.

The administrative environment of these institutions is first of all characterized by that emphasis on teaching. However, in common with larger institutions smaller colleges share an interest in research and professional development, commitment to the integrity of the academic disciplines, needs to respond to the demands of the overall institution, and a concern for the personal needs of individual faculty members.

Since the development of the SCA Small College Committee in 1978 the question of "what is a small college" has been asked frequently, but not answered satisfactorily. Within the next year there will be a serious attempt made to speak to that issue, and this panel is a part of that probing.

Just as teaching characterizes the small college environment, there is one factor that characterizes the small college teacher. It is the perception that he or she teaches in an environment that is significantly different from that found at larger institutions. This idea is expressed over and over among small college faculty members at regional and national gatherings. At times this attitude has puzzled colleagues from larger institutions who have wondered why we need a small college committee at all or who have suggested that we might join with community colleges rather than develop our own interest group within the larger regional and national speech associations.

Nevertheless, the belief persists among small college people that significant differences exist, as well as significant similarities. This panel today will consider some of what we see as administrative differences. Our respondent, from the perspective of a larger institution, will then comment upon our conclusions. This paper provides an introduction to the consideration of department administration at a small college by

considering physical and psychological factors which affect that administrative environment.

First it should be noted that it can be fairly easy to become an administrator within a small college speech department. Sometimes when you are hired you automatically are the senior faculty member in the field at your institution--even though this may be your first full-time teaching position. This was my case.

Also, with a department of fewer than five faculty members, all of whom have multiple responsibilities, the chair often rotates among that faculty, or the person most willing to take on the task becomes chair of the department...often with little or no preparation or training.

You may be in a department combined with another department, most commonly Theatre or English, and working with that department more directly than in a combined Speech and Theatre department in a larger institution. The English-Speech combination is much less likely in a larger institution. Yours may be an interdisciplinary major, with theatre or with another department or departments, necessitating administrative and curricular coordination across departments in ways that aren't common in larger institutions. You may not offer a major, but rather a series of courses that service the college as a whole, yet which you see as holding disciplinary integrity.

Any of these may be your teaching context, but it will primarily be a teaching context despite your administrative duties. You will teach a full load of some twelve or more semester hours each term. You will have little or no pressure to secure outside grants, may just be discovering that "publish or perish" can happen at your institution too, and will have no release time for directing co-curricular activities, serving on college-wide committees, chairing a department, or conducting research.

What I wish to argue today is that the environmental difference between a large and a small institution is not simply one of scale, that there is a qualitative difference in the department as well as a quantitative difference. We argue that dyad-triad-small group-large group-and public communication environments are different in certain ways. I feel we can extend many of these differences into the institutional environment based on size of a departmental faculty.

There are four points of difference that I particularly want to address: emphasis on teaching, multiple roles and responsibilities, use of informal channels, and institutional loyalties. While a given larger institution <u>may</u> have one or more of these characteristics, a small institution <u>must</u> have them. Furthermore, these four factors overlap and interrelate, making it difficult to discuss one without discussing the others--and making my outline extremely messy for the rest of this paper!

First of all, the emphasis on teaching. At a small college we

are hired to be teachers--not researchers and not researcher/teachers. We may do research, but this is an extra--maybe because we have chosen to do so to keep professionally involved or because of a personal interest, maybe because we have discovered that our institution now expects this of us. In either case, however, little or no release time will be provided to conduct that research, and we are expected to maintain a high quality of teaching in our classrooms. When the time comes to evaluate our contributions, teaching will be looked at first. Publications and service will be considered as well, but they will not make up for even "adequate" teaching performance.

This quality of teaching will be especially significant because, given a small speech faculty, my students will take many of their classes, for example, from me. Their background in speech is distinctively marked by my teaching, both in style and content, and since I plan the overall speech curriculum as well as teach the individual courses, this influence extends quite deeply. The quality of the students' learning depends very greatly on three, two, or even one teacher--much more so than at an institution of a larger size. Many small colleges have senior professors with many years of teaching at that college; they personally influence their programs and their majors just as our speech program and my speech majors very definitely bear my mark.

Replacing one of these professors becomes a considerable problem, either temporarily should there be a leave taken, or permanently should the professor retire or move on. Because the program so definitely has the former teacher's mark on it, the replacement has a considerable task of adjustment. Often an entire curriculum must be revised and a program's emphasis shifts. In some colleges where one or two faculty members have marked a program for a number of years, their departure can signal the end of the department unless the right person and the right transition is made. This doesn't mean that a clone must be found, but it means that the new person must be able to adjust, and to adjust to, the old ways, which will be quite ingrained. Any changes may well be perceived as radical.

And where do we find new people? This is a problem. Graduate schools don't often prepare their students as generalists--able to teach in nearly every area of the discipline--nor do graduate schools seem to encourage graduate students to think about small college teaching. The mentoring system instead encourages students to consider their specialties, and Ph. D. programs encourage them to focus on research rather than teaching. Small colleges, often if they are thought of at all, are seen as stepping stones to jobs at larger institutions not as ends in themselves. Yet teaching at a small college demands a commitment to teaching in that environment. Additionally, graduate students, who have been working within a department with a strong focus on the speech communication discipline, are often unprepared for the cross-disciplinary focus of many liberal arts institutions, as well as for the many demands the institution will place on them in addition to their teaching. The research

skills and the research project, in which they have invested themselves and their interest for the past several years, immediately become irrelevant as they instantly must be prepared to teach a broad range of subject areas instead. The focus on the undergraduate student and the emphasis on teaching may be new to them. The lack of colleagues to share their interests or who share their background may make them feel isolated. If they did not attend a small college as undergraduates their adjustment to the campus and the system is even more difficult.

Furthermore, many small colleges are not in metropolitan areas so employment of spouses becomes a significant issue. With two professionals in the family, as is often the case, rural areas and small towns cannot even be considered by many graduate students as places of possible employment. For others, they do not become places of lasting employment because of financial considerations or because of desires of either or both spouses to advance both careers.

With the difficulty in replacing a departing faculty member, the program itself is more vulnerable to being cut. The replacement of a faculty member in a depart..ent of even six or seven is less traumatic than the replacement in a department of one or two. With economic pressures new people may come in to newly-created non-tenure track positions. The impermanence affects both the person and the program; if the person fits in well, the trauma is great at departure time--and if the person responds to the temporary nature of the position the full-time commitment that the program requires will not be present. While larger institutions as well as small ones are facing the problems of new non-tenure track positions, one of these in a faculty of three is different from one of these in a faculty of six, or twenty-five.

Another factor about teaching at a small college has been noted above, the fact that small college teachers must be generalists. The area of my Ph. D. research constitutes about 1/6 of one course which I teach every two years...
Mine is an extreme case, but I teach interpersonal and small group communication, public speaking, argumentation and persuasion, language behavior, communication theory, communication responsibility, oral interpretation, a smattering of rhetorical criticism, a smattering of organizational communication, and a few other things. I also coach forensics and direct the readers theatre, and I have been the debate coach as well. If a new course is taught, I will teach it. My emphasis must be on breadth of preparation, with enough depth to keep me and my classes respectable. I haven't the luxury of study in depth of my specialty; on the other hand, I never get bored! Each semester is different, and I have complete freedom to teach what I choose when I choose in a way that seems to me to be educationally valid and maintains the integrity of the discipline and the program I teach.

When I go to a convention many of the programs do not fit my needs. I learn from exchanging ideas, materials, textbooks, and program suggestions with other teachers in situations like mine.

I study new textbooks avidly, and skim the journals every month for items I need to incorporate into my teaching. I try to discover long-term trends in the discipline as a whole and am unable to keep up in any one area because I must to some degree keep up in them all. I am sure that every small college teacher in the room feels the same way, and the problem of convention programming is another that is heard over and over at meetings of the small college committee.

While I wonder how well I am succeeding in preparing my students for graduate schools or professions I do have the first hand evidence that my graduates who go on to graduate school in speech or other areas have seemingly been well prepared. They have gotten in and done well, and none has indicated that they felt a deficiency in content or areas of preparation. Speech alumni from Ripon do well in the job market also. While I cannot claim that this has been due to their majoring in speech under our program, at least their having majored in a program in such a small department has not prevented their success.

A teacher in a small college does more than teach, however. We do research as teacher/scholars, despite our emphasis on teaching. Faculty development is an important consideration and, if we can find suitable replacements, sabbatical leaves are encouraged. We often do not have summer sessions so summers provide a time to attend summer school or workshops, to do research and writing. Our scholarship enriches our teaching and our teaching provides a focus for our scholarship.

As teachers are in greater and greater supply, and this will continue, a terminal degree is becoming essential at small colleges as at larger institutions. For tenure, and for promotion, professional development is beginning to be emphasized. This is coming to mean publications of some type--not necessarily books, but articles or convention papers are seen to be a mark of professionalism. Obtaining grants, attending NEH or NSF seminars, doing faculty recitals or exhibiting artistic work are becoming more and more emphasized. In ways this is good, for it provides a focus for our development as teacher/scholars and gets us into contexts where we can exchange ideas with our colleagues. We do learn more and can use this to enrich our teaching. But it adds another pressure in our lives and a new dimension to the tug of war that has existed between classrooms, directing co-curricular activities, and maintaining a personal life--making it a four-way tug with professional development making its demands as well..or in some cases a five or six way tug.

This paper was some three weeks late to our respondent. In the month prior I'd sent out 200 letters regarding articles for the ACA Bulletin, hosted a debate tournament, made two weekend forensic trips, written a small grant proposal as department chair, gotten out the SCA Women's Caucus Newsletter, and begun the program planning for the Senior College and University Section at the next SCA convention--plus teaching 13 semester hours and maintaining the day to day departmental activities. In

the three weeks this paper was late I'd attended two more forensic meets (one 4 days long), finished up the SCA convention program planning and gotten 11 programs sent off to Beverly Whittaker Long, done the department budget for next year with a 10% increase requested and an attempt made at justification even though we had been asked to hold to this year's levels, attended two special faculty meetings of serious import to the college as a whole, planned a readers theatre program and arranged the script, hosted a three day interdisciplinary forum on communication and the fine arts and arranged for a performance program for the creative writing club on campus, taught the 13 semester hours and conducted the day to day work of the department, and spent 5 days in seclusion with my husband at a cabin in northern Wisconsin where we go every couple of years with a jug of wine, a box of firewood, a stack of mystery novels, and with each other to become reacquainted after several months of chaos! (He teaches at a small college too...fortunately it's the same one at which I do so we get to see each other occasionally!)

We indeed have multiple responsibilities! We also are involved in the life of the college. Had I not been on sabbatical last year I might well be on one of the four faculty committees--all faculty are expected to be available to serve. I returned from my spring break (1/2 spent with my husband and 1/2 spent with the debate and forensic teams at a province convention and tournament) to my teaching load and pre-registration appointments with my twenty plus advisees and the beginning of readers theatre rehearsals now that the forensic season is over and I can be expected to have more free time...!

I've been learning to be department chair this year, my first in that capacity although I've had the responsibility for the speech area for the previous nine years. I now get to balance the needs of speech <u>and</u> drama and to try to see the larger perspective. I'm more active in the recruiting of majors for both areas, working more closely with our admissions office and having more interviews with students ohere for campus visits and more telephone calls to answer questions for potential freshmen. I feel a responsibility for the drama end of the budget in a way I haven't before. I have to balance between the various personalities of students and faculty within the department in ways I've never had to do before. I am working closely with the heads of the art and music departments, seeking to develop and promote the fine arts as a whole and looking for ways that they can be more fully integrated into the life of the campus. This has not been done before, but we decided such steps should be taken. A lot of the initiative has been mine.

Making these tasks sometimes easier, sometimes harder, is the third characteristic I feel distinguishes the small college context (along with multiple responsibilities and the emphasis on teaching): the use of informal channels.

For all that I do--departmental and curricular planning, affirmative action reports, budget and grant development, long

range planning, heading off an immediate problem that seems to be developing, handling the day to day tasks of the department--my channels are informal and my contacts personal. There is no faculty member I don't know; no dean, no head of an office or of an area up to and including the president of the college, no one I can't telephone or drop in on to ask a question or make a request. At times this is a tremendous help, but it can also be a problem since it can be difficult to separate personal and professional relationships. In addition, the maintainence of these informal ties is very time consuming.

Furthermore, in a department of three there is no anonymity. We know our students informally and in a variety of contexts and they know us. We know our deans and administrators and we know the members of other departments with whom we interact regularly. When we get along we get along well...and when we don't there is nowhere to go. We lack buffers and we lack distance, actual and psychological. We know each other's strengths, and each other's vulnerabilities. The situation is a bit like the child in the nursery rhyme--when this is good it is very, very good...but when it is bad it is horrid!

One area in particular in which problems can be created is that area of evaluations. This can be difficult in any context, but among those not trained as administrators (including most academics) and who are often friends, the problem increases. This is true despite all our communication theory about the need for and value of feedback. With a deparement and an institution committed to the growth and development of all its personnel, evaluations need not be threatening--within a department and an institution facing economic uncertainties, potentially or actually declining enrollments, competition for salary dollars and departmental faculty slots, evaluations become highly threatening. Tenure, promotions, merit pay--these easily get tangled up with freindships and self interest and personal dislikes and personal integrity. With the informality of the channels of communication and the small town nature of the campus there is considerable potential for tension.

The last area I'd like to note is that of loyalty to our institutions. We feel this loyalty and this loyalty is demanded of us. The college sees itself as a community and it responds as a community in many ways.

Such loyalty is time-consuming, however. Consider faculty governance. At our institution all faculty attand all faculty meetings. We take an active role in developing educational policies, setting and maintaining academic standards, encouraging faculty development, and participating in evaluations and in promotion and tenure decisions. There are four faculty committees on which service is expected if the faculty member is elected, one with each of these areas of emphasis. I'm happy to say I chaired the Faculty Development Committee which proposed this committee system, cutting the number of committees from some 20 to these 4. The new structure has intensified rather than cut down on faculty involvement in faculty governence for all of us

and especially for the 21 faculty members serving on committees at any one time, but we are involved with substantive matters of formulating educational and professional policies rather than spending our time as a body on the carrying out of policies presented to us. Faculty meetings are no shorter, but they are more meaningful.

For a variety of reasons the faculty is seeing itself more as a faculty and less as members of individual departments. This has benefits to the college, especially to a liberal arts college, but it may have costs as well. The institution expects loyalty to itself and to the teaching profession; if this conflicts with loyalty to our disciplines or with personal needs, problems may result. Financial demands and demands for time are two demands being made now as a part of institutional loyalty. We are expected to sacrifice personally and from within our disciplines for the greater good of the institution, other departments, and our students. As we are part of a community, close to each other and to our students both physically and psychologically, such conflicts generate a particular stress. They also have the potential to generate a particular understanding.

I have said we are first of all teachers but that we perform multiple roles and have multiple responsibilities. For a teacher at an institution of any size, there are only 24 hours in the day. We all manage to fill the time, and all simply do our jobs. But for the teacher at the small college there seem to be a greater variety of jobs. Breadth characterizes the scope of our departmental responsibilities just as it characterizes the scope of our teaching responsibilities. Our channels of communication on campus are informal. We live and work in close proximity physically to colleagues in other departments and interdisciplinary or cross-disciplinary ties may be actively encouraged. Yet we feel isolated professionally from our colleagues at other institutions, and often feel professional conventions have nothing to offer us. We have competition for our professional and disciplinary loyalties arising from loyalties to our institution and the campus community.

While these elements may exist at a larger institution, I feel their presence characterizes the small college and it is within this context that the small college administrator must operate.